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FEATURES

Random Roles: Janeane Garofalo

By Sean O'Neal
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Welcome to Random Roles, wherein we talk to actors about the roles that defined their careers. The catch: They don't know beforehand what roles we'll ask them to talk about.

The actor: Janeane Garofalo, who's been everything from a proto-slacker in *Reality Bites* to a brash media consultant on *The West Wing*. Garofalo briefly flirted with leading-lady parts in critically maligned romantic comedies, but she's still best known as "the sarcastic best friend," a role she embodied so well that the industry still casts for a "Janeane Garofalo type" if they don't go directly to the source. Following a two-year stint on Air America radio, Garofalo returned to stand-up comedy, doing a string of dates alongside her *Ratatouille* co-star Patton Oswalt.

The West Wing (2005-06) — "Louise Thornton"

Janeane Garofalo: I was really excited to do it, because I'd always wanted to try drama with odd moments of levity. Plus, it was an exceptionally well-written show, and it's very rare in television when you get on something good. I was only supposed to do three episodes. All of a sudden, I was on 22 of them, and I just didn't say anything. I thought they forgot I was only supposed to do three. They just never stopped calling me in every Monday for table read-throughs. I did have a problem with my eyebrows, though. I drew them in super-heavy like Groucho Marx, and I can't really explain why I would do a thing like that. It looks ridiculous. Just know that I know it looks ridiculous.

Wet Hot American Summer (2001) — "Beth"

JG: That was the best time I ever had doing a project, and also the drunkest. I fell down a lot, due to the wet terrain and the heavy drinking.

Mystery Men (1999) — "The Bowler"

JG: That was also before I quit drinking. I didn't fall down that much, though, since there wasn't wet terrain in Los Angeles. It was very long hours and very little got accomplished. It was one of those alleged blockbusters that was overbudgeted and overhyped. It went from being a great script when it was sent to me, to being—in my opinion—a fairly mediocre non-event. But it was nice to get paid that much to sit around.

The A.V. Club: Do you think they were trying to build a franchise?

JG: [Laughs.] I have no idea what they were trying to do, but they sure didn't accomplish it.

AVC: Would you have liked to have seen yourself on, say, a Burger King glass?

JG: Well, I was a doll, and I was on T-shirts. I had a T-shirt, but one of my dogs ruined it. He'd had surgery and the vet suggested I put a shirt on him so he wouldn't lick his scar. He then proceeded to urinate all over it.

The Adventures Of Rocky And Bullwinkle (2000) — "Minnie Mogul"

JG: I was only in that for two seconds, and I never saw it. I was thrilled to work opposite Carl Reiner and Robert De Niro. Mr. Reiner was very chatty and delightful, but I learned that if you want Robert De Niro to like you, don't speak at all, and he'll be friendly to you. If you're chatty and ask him dumb questions that he's been asked a million times, he'll be quiet. If you're quiet too, he'll be conversant with you. We'd done *Cop Land* together, and because I was quiet on both sets, I think he felt comfortable being nice to me.



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